

Prediction as a part of the reader's competence

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Abstract: This research intends to help understand the process of predictions made while reading literary texts. Our starting position is grounded in phenomenological theories (Ingarden, Iser, Jaus) and supported by the general findings of the OECD/PISA study in the domain of reading literacy. The goal of this paper is to clarify the possible directions in which the readers' horizon of expectations could develop as well as its influence on the further reception of the text (whether it does or does not coincide with the facts from further narration). The research was conducted with 28 high school students (ages 14 to 15) in Belgrade (Serbia), using qualitative methodology. With the help of individual semi-structured interviews, we guided the respondents through the sequential reading of a story selected from the PISA items (The Gift). After each paragraph, the students were invited to express their expectations about further story development, after which they continued to read until the next break. Using the qualitative analysis, we defined and scrutinized more deeply the following ways of predicting further events: a) expectations dictated by the author's intention, b) expectations that selectively follow the intent of the text, and c) expectations which are not based on the signals in the text. The definition of the possible types of expectations, found within the story, can be useful for understanding the difficulties that students experience while trying to understand and envision literary texts they are reading.

Keywords: horizon of expectations, literary, reading, implied reading.

Introduction

Reading literacy is one of the key competence skills and is the basic element of learning and development (Baucal, 2009; Baucal & Pavlović-Babić, 2010; Kirby, 2007; Kirsch et al., 2002; Pavlović-Babić & Baucal, 2013). Even though reading literacy is of great importance for formal and informal education,

studies show that the students in Serbia do not succeed in adequately developing this vital competence. There are only 2.2% of students with the highest level of reading competency, compared to 8.6% in OECD countries (Pavlović-Babić & Baucal, 2013), which means that most of the students in Serbia have a lower understanding of what they have read (Branković, Buđevac, Ivanović, & Jović, 2013). Even though, within PISA, literacy is defined as active and critical engagement in the society, and is examined using a variety of texts (see for ex. Kirsch et al., 2002; LSFWT, 2003; Pavlović-Babić & Baucal, 2013), in this paper, we are focused only on literary texts that make the base of the Serbian Language curriculum (Serbian as a mother tongue). The dominance of the literary texts over other types of text in this program is related to the nature and function of the school subject. The purpose of this subject is to get familiar with the language and culture. Based on the curricula for the Serbian Language for the eighth grade, in the Republic of Serbia (NPP, 2010), it is expected that the students will be able to independently: read, experience, interpret, value the literary artworks of various genres; understand logically, and critically evaluate the text that was read.

Comprehension of the literary text is always connected with its interpretation because of the nature of linguistic expression. It is noticeably harder for the students to comprehend the literary than the informative text (Buđevac & Baucal, 2014). Even though the students usually know the terms and situations that are demonstrated with the stylized narrative text, the diversity of the lexicon and the ways in which the style is estranged make the understanding more difficult (Hiebert & Cervetti, 2011). One of many theories that deal with the understanding process of a literary text is the theory of reception, which is the starting point of this research (Eko, 2003; Ingarden 1971; Izer, 1978, 1989; Jaus, 1978). We rely on the aspects of those theories that are oriented towards the understanding of the literary text actualization process. Here, we primarily refer to the conceptual determination of the reading elements that are considered in these theories; the act of the literary text analysis is among them. It implies the reflective concretization of the read text, which appears when the intention of the text is followed (Ingarden, 1971, p. 31). The literary text does not create any real objects; the reader makes it real when reacting the way he or she was expected to (Izer 1978, p. 97). The actualization of the textual content forms a horizon of expectations which can be determined based on three factors: from the known norms and the poetics of the genre, from the implicit relations with the works from the history of

literature, and the opposition of the fiction and the reality. The third factor, which is the most important for our research, implies that the reader can observe the new work both in the narrow horizon of their literary expectation as well as in the broader horizon of their life experience (Izer, 1978, p. 46–47). During the reading process, the third factor implies a set of doubts, assumptions, self-corrections, various conventions, and hypotheses; presumptions that connections are the fulfilled or unfulfilled predictions, based on textual signals. Textual signals can be explained as explicit and implicit information and allusions (Bužinjska & Markovski 2009, p. 110–111), the empty spaces that allow the reader to shape the narration and construct its purpose (Izer, 1978, p. 103). The reader takes the aesthetic stance and reacts to the aesthetically relevant determinants in the text with certain emotions and evaluative response (Ingarden, 1971, p. 44). Their reaction is in accordance with what has been suggested by the so-called *implied reader* (Izer, 1989, p. 64). The implied reader represents a certain receptive instance created by the author and is the part of the textual structure and the reading strategist embedded within the text. The implied reader is the constructive element of the narration strategy. It should be added here that the implied reader is limited with the textual contextualization in the reader's experience, during the process of understanding (Ingarden, 1971, p. 23). Therefore, the reception will much depend on it. In this respect, the term *alterity* will be important. It marks the difference between the text and its actualization in the reader's reception (Lešić, 2008, p. 77).

The process of the literary text actualization implies the sensory revival of the fictive world in the reader's conscience. Understanding the text is one of the basic factors and, at the same time, the result of that process. In other words, understanding the text is the requirement for its actualization and aesthetic experience. It unavoidably includes the higher levels of reading literacy, and the higher levels imply that the comprehension of the lower levels has been mastered. Looking at the PISA results of Serbian students, we can conclude that most of them remain at the level of knowledge reproduction. It means that the greatest concentration of the students' achievements is on the first and the second level of the PISA scale (Pavlović-Babić & Baucal, 2013, p. 14). It also means that even the abilities described at the third level are a challenge for our average student. They imply, among other things, the following (OECD, 2013, p. 79):

Interpretative tasks at this level require the reader to integrate several parts of a text in order to identify a main idea, understand a

relationship or construe the meaning of a word or phrase. They need to take into account many features in comparing, contrasting or categorising. Often the required information is not prominent or there is much competing information; or there are other text obstacles, such as ideas that are contrary to expectation or negatively worded. Reflective tasks at this level may require connections, comparisons, and explanations, or they may require the reader to evaluate a feature of the text.

Students' requirements for understanding the ideas from the text that are different from the expected ones appear in the description. The theory of reception is yet another theory that deals with this issue, which is the reason why we chose the narrative text and the assignment from that level of understanding of the literary text example. The goal of this research is to clarify the possible directions in which the readers' horizon of expectations, and its influence on the further reception of the text, could develop (whether it does or does not coincide with the facts from the further narration). Testing the directions in which the expectations might develop can help us understand the difficulties the students face when it comes to understanding the literary texts. It can help us come up with the methods that can be used to avoid these obstacles in class.

The central concept of this research is the *expectation*, regarded as the psychological concept, one of the cognitive strategies in the process of understanding the text (Fellowes & Oakley, 2018, p. 303). In the context of our research, it is defined through the viewpoint of literary science. These two aspects of the term *expectation* are hard to separate. Its definition, from the literary science point of view, is based on the psychological reactions of the reader and/or the implicit reader that the author embedded in the text. The psychological aspect of the term is formed within the aesthetic act of the actualization of the fictive content of the literary text. Therefore, two different dimensions of the expectations will be simultaneously explained.

Method

Research process. The research was conducted in two phases: 1) Individual testing and 2) semi-structured interviews with the students from the first grade of high school (15 years).

We took the text "The Gift" by Louis Dolaride (The University of Mississippi, professor emeritus) from the PISA base of published tests, used in the 2000

PISA testing (see appendix 1), to examine the role of prediction in the reading process when the contradictory signals occur in the text. Since this item was not conducted in Serbia, the results from the PISA base could not have been used. However, we were able to use the general results our students scored solving the tasks with the third level of complexity, which was possible for 36.0% of students in Serbia against 57.2% in OECD countries.¹

(1) The first part of the testing was necessary in order to confirm the assumption that the students' general results on the PISA tests, dealing with the examination of the reading literacy, refer to this item that was not conducted in Serbia. It was implied in the test that the students should read the selected text as a whole and answer the question that inspects the comprehension of the text that was read. We assumed that the students would make mistakes when solving this task because the story ending was contradictory to the passage in which a certain task-related expectation was formed. We wondered whether the students would come to the correct conclusion if the question were asked before they saw the end of the story.

(2) Encouraged by the results from the first part of the research, in the second phase, we set the task differently. We focused on one narration strategy – the Straight Cut Technique, modeled on continuation novels (Izer, 1978, p. 103–105):

The continuation novels end at the place in the story where the tense situation that requires an urgent solution would appear, or at the place where we would want to find more information about the outcome of what has been read. Such effect of delay would make us try to find the information about the further sequence of events that is unavailable to us at that moment (Izer, 1978, p. 104).

The starting point of the process of creating the task was the analysis of the text and the process of defining the intentions contained in the construct of the implicit reader. We divided the text into eight parts – eight slips. The breaks were determined in accordance with the horizon of expectations of the implicit reader (see appendix 2). During the individual semi-structured interviews, the students read part by part. The reading was stopped in the moments when a certain expectation or a set of expectations appeared before the students learned the further development of the narration and the series

¹ It is worth mentioning that this task was categorized in 2000 as the task of the fourth level of complexity. According to the current scale (OECD, 2013), it is categorized as the third.

of contradictions. After each break, they were asked to provide their opinion as readers (see appendix 3), stating their (1) expectations about the future development of the story (breaks 1, 2, 3, 4, and 6), (2) the meaning that derived from those expectations (breaks 5 and 8), or (3) to explain the mental state of the character after the contradictory signals regarding her actions in the text (break 7). The purpose of the interview was to record the process that brings the students closer to their expectations or conclusions about the text. The fourth, fifth, sixth, and seventh break, as well as the answers after the eighth part of the story, were important for the research question in this paper.

The pilot research was conducted on a random sample of 5 students. In that phase, we encountered the first indications of future problems. It was revealed that some students did not have failed expectations. Some students formed expectations that did not completely coincide with the intention of the text. These preliminary results induced the following questions: Can we talk about a failed expectation in this case? Does the reader, who builds the expectation without following the intention of the text, notice the contradiction in that intention? Does the problem of text actualization occur before the failure of the assumed expectation? Our goal was to record the expectations, attitudes, and thoughts that were formed in contact with the mentioned elements of the text. The expectations that disappeared after the text had been introduced became part of the general impression and knowledge of the text. When they take the standard test, the students answer the questions only when the text is read as a whole.

Sample: 100 students from one High School in Belgrade (age 14-15) were tested in the first phase and 28 students from another school in the second phase.

Instrument: The selected literary text is characterized by a fluid intention in creating the horizon of expectations. Regarding the selection of this text for PISA studies, Kirsh et al. (2002, p. 53, 54) pointed out:

This short story represents the humane, affective and aesthetic qualities of literature that make reading this kind of text an important part of many people's personal lives. A significant reason for its inclusion in the PISA assessment was the literary quality of the piece: its spare, precise use of language and its

strong yet subtle rendering of the character's state of mind and changes in character's response depending on the situation.

The task that we took as a starting point examined the perception of contradictory signals in the intention of the text and their understanding.

This task [R119Q04] required a high level of text-based inference in order to construe the meaning of a section of text in context, dealing with ambiguities and ideas that may be contrary to expectations. The reader needed to infer psychological meaning, following thematic links over several paragraphs, in deciding which of the four alternatives could be the best answer (Kirsch et al., 2002, p. 60).

In the paragraph preceding the fourth break, two sets of contradictory signals were equally represented, directing an implied reader towards alternative expectations. We called them A and B sets of text signals. These sets contained three dominant signals each (see appendix 4) and were equally represented and equally suggestive, forming the implied reader's alternative expectation. These two contradictory sets of expectations, although mutually exclusive, were equally plausible until the appearance of the next set of signals in the text. The exclusivity we refer to did not exclude the possibility of simultaneous expectations of both A and B outcomes in the moment of the break. Furthermore, the intention of the text contained alternative expectation. We will see how our respondents faced the contradictory implicit expectations in this situation.

The first failed expectation and the character's first choice of the outcome B occurred in the sixth passage. Both the intention and the narrative tension were more intensely oriented towards the expectation A. The mentioned elements of the narration, together with the signals from the previous passages, kept the implicit expectations within the alternative frames. We made the sixth break at the moment when expectation A had the implicit advantage, as opposed to the previously failed expectation A.

The fifth break was committed to the task from the PISA test that was used in the first part of this examination, and in the moment when the students did not know that the expectation would fail by the end of the story. The difference in the interview question, compared to the first part of the examination (test), was in the type of the answer. In the test, the question was

close-ended and multiple-choice, whereas the interview question was open-ended. For this reason, we repeated the question in the form of a test after the students had read the whole text in parts. After the final break, the students were given the initial open-ended question test.

The seventh break was committed to the argumentation of the contradictions in the text, asking the reader to explain the reason for the mental state of the main character.

Data analysis. The results of the first part of our research are shown in percentages, with regards to the total number of respondents. We qualitatively processed the transcripts of all interviews using thematic analysis, inductively, from the students' results to conclusions based on the results using the MAXQDA12 program. In coding our results and defining themes, we consulted colleagues participating in the same project (psychologists and researchers of language and literature).

Results and discussion

In the first part of this research, the results revealed that only 10.2% of the students understood the contradictory signals in the text and provided the correct answer on the test. For the same task, the OECD average score in the year 2000 was 41% (35% in the US). The results we obtained from the initial test matched the local students' average score on the PISA test. The results point to the problem with the actualization of the literary text that should enable us to comprehend it accurately.

The second part was oriented towards the clarification of one element of the literary work actualization – the horizon of expectations. Textual signals that form the assumed expectations within the fourth and the sixth passage were partially coincidental and assumed the alternative possibilities for the further development of the story, which made them suitable for comparison. Therefore, they will be presented together. The following types of expectations appeared (the frequency of expectations is stated in parenthesis):

- a) Expectations based on one possibility for further development of the story (*f IV*: 23, *f VI*: 24).
- b) Expectations of open alternative possibilities (*f IV*: 4, *f VI*: 2).
- c) Lack of expectations. (*f IV*: 1, *f VI*: 1).

It is observable that the expectations based on one set of signals in the text prevailed. In the process of forming the reading prediction, the students opted for one out of two contradictory possibilities for the further development of the story. The other set was dismissed entirely, even though they were both equally suggestive. The question arose regarding which of the two contradictory sets of signals was more prevalent among our respondents. We broke down these types of expectations depending on the set of signals that derived from them, which provided clear sub-types.

1. We named the expectations based on one possibility in the following way:
 - a) A set of signals from the text produces expectation A
 - b) B set of signals from the text produces expectation B
 - c) $\neg A$ expectation implies an answer in which it is emphasized that the outcome directed by A signals will not happen in the further text. The expectation based on an explicit negation of A set of signals could be interpreted as an expectation that matched B expectation.
 - d) There were also expectations that were not based on the signals from the text.
2. There was a small percentage of answers based on alternative possibilities:
 - a) A or B expectation,
 - b) A expectation or the expectations not based on the signals from the text,
3. Lack of expectations in the reading process.

After the fourth break, the greatest number of students opted for one of the two possibilities, and the distribution based on the chosen set of signals was almost even. This finding confirmed our starting point that the two contradictory sets were equal in meaning. When forming their reading expectations, the students showed a kind of exclusivity. The expectation of only one possibility implied that they simultaneously disregarded the signals that refer to the opposite possibility. They showed a lack of acceptance of the simultaneous existence of two possibilities in the further development of the story, even though they were suggested.

Basis of expectation	Expectations concerning the intent of the text	Sets of expectations	IV break <i>f</i>	VI break <i>f</i>
Expectations based on one possibility	Selectively follow the intent of the text	Expectation A	8	11
		Expectation B	10	12
		(¬A) Expectations of what is not going to happen	2	2
	Expectations are not based on the signals in the text	Expectations that are not based on the signals in the text	3	0
Alternative expectations	Follow the intent of the text	Expectation A or B	2	2
	Selectively follow the intent of the text	Expectations A or the expectations not based on the signals in the text	2	0
Lack of expectations	Expectations are not based on the signals in the text	Lack of expectations	1	1

Table 1. Expectations after the fourth and sixth break

Those who opted for the A set of signals did not take into account any of the signals from the B set. Accordingly, the students expecting the B outcome did not take into account any of the signals from the A set. Also, the students that opted for the B set of signals after the fourth break were denied one important aesthetic component of the reception and interpretation of this text – failed expectation. A very small number of students based their expectations on the intention from the text – that the possibilities for the outcome A and outcome B were equal. Expectations in relation to the intent of the text:

- a) Follow the intent of the text (*f*2).
- b) Selectively follow the intent of the text (*f*22).
- c) Expectations are not based on the signals in the text (*f*4).

As opposed to this evident exclusivity in the prediction process, some of the students changed their expectations between two consecutive breaks. A comparison of expectations after the fourth and sixth break was especially interesting. The formation of expectations was influenced by signals from the previous paragraphs as well as by the reading experience that showed the students that the expectations in the text could be failed. The distribution of expectations might seem pretty similar. After the sixth break, we had to take

into consideration the experienced failed expectation A, on the one hand, and the new and intensive implications of the expectation A, found in the narration, on the other. Consequently, we recorded whether the expectations between the fourth and the sixth break were changed and to what extent.

Changes in the formation of the readers' horizon of expectations after the sixth break	Expectations (<i>f</i>)			
	A	B and $\neg A$	Alternative	Lack of exp.
They adhere to the same expectation	3	7	1	1
They change their expectation for the opposite one	5	4	-	-
They make a decision after the sixth break	2	1	-	0
They change their expectation for an alternative one	0	1	0	0
Their change in expectations is not based on the signals in the text	2	1	0	-
Total	12	14	1	1

Table 2. Changes in expectations between the fourth and the sixth break

Our results revealed that two dominant streams of expectation development could be distinguished. One group of students maintained the same one-way expectations, and their reception of the text imposed the question of their ability to notice the contradiction; this especially refers to the students that opted for the B set of expectations. The other part was the students whose predictions were opposite from the ones they previously had. They reconsidered their previous decision, rejected the signals that they previously included in their decision, and included those signals they had previously disregarded.

The relationship between expectations in the fourth and sixth break	<i>f</i>	
	Explanation describes the contradiction	Explanation does not describe the contradiction
Did not change the expectation	5	7
Changed the expectation	7	9

Table 3. The relationship between the explanation of contradictions in the text and their manifestation in expectations

With the change from set A to set B, the previously failed expectation contributed to the decision making. However, there were students that changed their expectations according to the previously failed one. The problem of the text actualization appeared before the expectation was failed, supported by the exclusivity when forming the expectations and the disobedience in following the intentions from the text.

On the other hand, the changes in predictions address the perception of the contradictions from the text. The question is whether the students experienced the process of prediction as an intertextual moment or as their personal non-literary decision making about the further story development and the act of correction of their own reception. In other words, could the act of text actualization be reached through discussion? For that reason, we proceeded to ask the question about the relationship between the changes in expectations and the previous exclusivity. The question after the seventh break, when the students had the chance to describe the contradiction manifested in the character's reaction, was helpful.

These results showed us that only those students who knew how to argue the contradictions in the character's intentions built their understanding in accordance with the new information from the text. Regardless of the unjustified one-sidedness of their expectations, they showed the awareness of the existence of contradictory signals.

Relationship between the expectations from the fourth and sixth break	<i>Examples</i>	
	Explains the contradiction	Does not explain the contradiction
Did not change the expectation	Because she expected a higher level of cruelty. She expected to be able to fight with the cat, to kill it, because that sounds, so to say, the most logical. Because the cat was a threat to her, to her life, and it would have been best to get rid of it. Then more food would be left for her. But, still, she decided to be humane, to take care of it, and she gave it food, which is against the logic.	Maybe she was stunned by the fact that she was able to do that, that she dared to do that. Well, because she did that without thinking, she gave food to the cat without thinking, even though she needed the food to survive.

Changed the expectation	Well, because she was in great danger, threatened by such a big animal, yet she decided not to get rid of it, but instead to help it and give it food.	Because when she threw the meat through that window, she heard the cat roar and she did not expect that. She thought that the cat would be satisfied with what she had done and be grateful in a way. However, no, she... we saw her leave the gun and take the ham, but she still heard roaring sounds that surprised her.
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Table 4. Examples of the students' explanations of the contradictions in the text, in comparison with their manifestation in the students' expectations

On the other hand, when the contradiction was not explained, the most common answers focused on unimportant signals from the text. This was especially the case with the students that had B expectations after the fourth break. The representative examples of the students' answers that explained and did not explain the contradiction can be found above, table 4.

The student that had not verbalized his expectations during the interview, after the seventh break, provided an explanation for the contradiction in the text. Every explanation of a contradiction, regardless of the previously stated one-way expectations, gave a clue about the actualization that, to a large degree, still matched the intention in the text. This conclusion was confirmed by the fact that there were no expectations that were not in accordance with the intention after the sixth break (Table 1). On the other hand, the lack of awareness about the existence of the contradictory signals showed us that most of the students had issues with the reading strategies, the understanding of the strategy of narration, and the act of text actualization. Why the student did not follow the intention of the text? Does the student experience a failure of expectations, as a reader, or denied this cognitive and aesthetic component of the textual reception? The dominant place of indeterminacy in this story is the identity of the main character.² The stratification of the recipient's experience, ranging from naming the character "little girl" to merely using the pronoun "her," came from the aesthetic component of the text. Those students that had the need to somehow determine and state the subject of the story called her "the little girl" (f6), "the girl" (f7), "the woman" (f4), or "the female" (f2). *On the other hand*, those students that did not want to determine

² We know that the main character is female and that she was alone in the house at the time of the flood.

the subject simply used the pronoun “her.” Even though we noticed a certain dose of closeness in the students’ identification of the character, their answers did not suggest the direction of their expectations regarding her actions. Both those that called her *the girl* and those that called her *the woman* equally predicted in some of their expectations that she would kill the cat.

Ultimately, we will compare our respondents’ results in solving the assignment we started out with. Without the Straight Cut Technique, this question was correctly answered by 10.2% of the 100 tested students. In an interview conducted with 28 students, after the fifth break, the correct answer was provided by 17.8% respondents. After the Straight Cut Technique was implemented, and the expectations in the reading process examined, 35.7% of the respondents gave the correct answer.

Conclusions and implications

Based on the results shown in this paper, we can conclude that the students mostly based their expectations on the signals from the text, although they did not completely follow the intention from the narration. More precisely, the students were unprepared to follow the narration strategies that would help them develop their reading strategies. Regardless of their exclusivity when forming the expectations, we can conclude from the final results that the usage of the Straight Cut Technique and examination of the horizon of expectation had an impact on a better understanding of ambiguities and contradictions. This conclusion is partially confirmed by the respondents’ reactions during the interviews and their interest in the further reading of the paused text. In the classroom, the usage of the Straight Cut Technique to interpret prose would imply the following methodological actions:

- breaks in reading in accordance with the intent of the text;
- expressing the expectations about further story development;
- finding explicit and implicit signals in the text to be considered while reading the text and predicting what will happen next;
- valuation of the significance of the detected elements of text;
- directing the students towards the appropriate expectations, as well as appropriate readers’ answers (depending on the level of the significance of signals and their mutual relation).

If the teachers were familiar with both the aesthetic components of the reading experience and the psychological processes that are implied when reading and understanding the text, they would be able to help the students with their personal reading strategies more successfully.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. The text “The Gift,”

Louis Dollarhide and the 9th question I. irsch, John de Jong, Dominique Lafontaine, Joy McQueen Juliette Mendelovits Christian Monseur (2000): Reading for change performance and engagement across countries results from PISA, Paris, France: OECD Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (Kirsch, De Jong, Lafontaine, McQueen, Mendelovits, & Monseur, 2002, p. 54–56, 60).

Appendix 2. The places where the reading was stopped were:

Break 1 – end of line 13.

Break 2 – line 33, before the sentence: It was a tree.

Break 3 – line 42, before the sentence: She knew now what it was...

Break 4 – line 47, before the sentence: As long as she guarded...

Break 5 – line 81, before the sentence: As she hung the rest of the ham back on its nail...

Break 6 – line 88, the sentence was interrupted in the following way: Then, without thinking about what she was doing...

Break 7 – line 93, before the sentence: She could hear the sounds of the panther tearing at the meat.

Break 8 – The end of the story.

Appendix 3. Questions after the breaks:

1. What will happen in this story?
2. What happened to the house?
3. Who or what is on the porch?
4. What happened to the panther?
5. What do the word: “and then I’ll see to you” mean in this text?
6. What did she do?
7. Why was she astonished?

Appendix 4. The components of the text that form expectations A and B:

A set of signals before the fourth break: 1. The panther represents a threat; 2. The character in the story has a rifle; 3. The cat was scratching the wall. B set of signals before the fourth break: 1. The cat represents a gift; 2. The title of the story is “The gift”; 3. The character in the story perceives the panther’s screams as suffering.

